

Catholic Responses to Consultations on the Supreme Court Decision - Euthanasia & Assisted Suicide

Federal Consultation :

External Panel on Options for a Legislative Response to Carter vs. Canada

- A call out has been made through the diocese (namely, via the Weekly News Bulletin and Parish Bulletins) for the faithful to participate in the consultation. Deadline: November 1st.
- The **Catholic Health Alliance of Canada** has written a letter and will have a private session with the panel to present their point of view.
- The **Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops** has issued an official submission (5-page document). It states:
 1. The document states that the CCCB is strongly opposed to euthanasia and assisted suicide, and includes citations of the Catechism of the Catholic Church on the matter.
 2. It advocates for high-quality palliative care, long-term care and home care to be made easily accessible to all Canadians.
 3. The one-year period given by the Supreme Court is deemed too short for the change in laws and requests that the Notwithstanding Clause be invoked to extend this timeline to five years, in order to allow for a sufficient period of reflection for Canadians.
 4. It calls for the protection of the conscience rights of all men and women who work as caregivers, and that this respect be extended to health care institutions as well.
- The **Catholic Organization for Life and the Family** has issued an official submission (3-page document). It states:
 1. The document suggests that Canada should NOT allow for euthanasia and assisted suicide (however, it does not suggest how to bypass the Supreme Court decision)
 2. Instead, a suggestion is made that a national strategy prioritizing palliative care be developed, based on the following:
 - a. promoting research and education in the field of pain relief;
 - b. devoting more public resources to the creation of palliative care units or health centres with a view to providing access to all citizens who need it;
 - c. adopting more generous tax measures that will allow caregivers to devote themselves more freely in supporting their sick or dying relatives.

Pan-Canadian Consultation (10 Provinces & 2 Territories):

Expert Advisory Group on Physician Assisted Dying

- In Manitoba, the **Catholic Health Corporation of Manitoba (CHCM)** has issued a response (20-page document). It states:

1. The document repeatedly states that the CHCM it does not support voluntary euthanasia or assisted suicide. It states that the organization will not provide physician assisted dying and, furthermore, that health care institutions should not be required to provide it. If it should be provided, it recommends that it be done by external, independent mechanisms.
2. The document advocates for the respect of the right of the physicians to conscientious objection, meaning the right to refuse to assist or participate in physician assisted dying.
3. Regarding the referral of a patient who wishes to access physician assisted dying, the CHCM states: *"We believe that it will be essential to develop a mechanism by which physicians can navigate this delicate terrain of protecting their personal conscience and professional integrity while not abandoning patients entrusted to their care."*

**College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba (CPSM):
Physician Assisted Dying Working Group**

NB: A document containing draft guidelines on Physician Assisted Dying have already been made public, on October 15, 2015.

Brief analysis - Encouraging aspects of the CPSM draft guidelines:

1. The guidelines protects the right of physicians to conscientious objection - it states : "A physician who elects not to provide or participate in physician assisted dying for any reason is not required to provide it or participate in it or to refer the patient to a physician who will provide physician assisted dying to the patient."

(However, the guidelines require physicians to "provide patients with access to another member or resource that will provide accurate information about physician assisted dying: resources may include but are not limited to other health care providers, counsellors and publicly available resources.")

2. At least 2 physicians are required to be involved in physician assisted dying.

3. Counselling and an independent psychiatric assessment are recommended in certain circumstances.

- A call out has been made through the diocese (namely, via the Weekly News Bulletin and Parish Bulletins) for the faithful to participate in the consultation. Deadline: November 15.
- There will likely be a letter of support for the CPSM draft statement written on the part of the **Tri-Diocesan Committee for Life and the Family** (signed by the 3 bishops of Southern Manitoba if they agree to it), to recognize the positive aspects of the draft guidelines and to encourage them to implement these aspects in the final version of their guidelines – especially regarding the respect of the right of physicians to conscientious objection.
- Several Catholic physicians from Manitoba were involved in the CPSM consultation process, namely as part of a 'Conscience Protection Committee', affiliated with the Christian Medical and Dental Association.